

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07

LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 NEAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

SY-05 MCT-01 FBOE-00 A-01 USSS-00 OPR-02 MCE-00

ACDA-12 /103 W

-----023539 281634Z /50-40

P 281440Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9376

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 9175

PARIS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, TS

SUBJ: TUNISIAN LABOR REACTIONS TO GOT CABINET SHIFTS

SUMMARY: IN IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF CABINET SHAKEUP, HABIB ACHOUR OF UGTT PREDICTS INCREASING CIVIL AND LABOR UNREST IN WEEKS AHEAD, STATES INTENTION TO FORM LABOR PARTY IN TUNISIA, AND EXPRESSES SHARP CONCERN OVER USG/GOT ARMS PURCHASE AGREEMENT.

1. HABIB ACHOUR, SECRETARY GENERAL OF TUNISIAN GENERAL WORKERS' CONFEDERATION (UGTT), MEMBERS OF HIS EXECUTIVE BOARD, AND LABATT DISCUSSED CURRENT POLITICAL/LABOR SITUATION DECEMBER 27 AT UGTT HEADQUARTERS. ACHOUR AND HIS COUNSELORS, OBVIOUSLY ELATED OVER RECENT EVENTS, FELT THAT FIRINGS AND RESIGNATIONS OF "MODERATES" IN CABINET VINDICATED UNION POSITIONS IN ONGOING CONFLICT WITH GOT IN EYES OF PEOPLE. ACHOUR AND COMPANY CLEARLY INTEND TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION. HE PREDICTED FLATLY TO LABATT THAT CIVIL UNREST, STRIKES, AND SOLIDARITY DEMONSTRATIONS WOULD INCREASE OVER COMING

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WEEKS. FOR GOOD MEASURE, HE CONFIDED THAT FORMATION OF NEW LABOR PARTY WAS IN THE WORKS.

2. UGTT BOARD AND ACHOUR WERE CONCERNED OVER END USE OF WEAPONS PURCHASED UNDER USG/GOT ARMS AGREEMENT. HE WANTED EMBASSY TO INSERT CLAUSE INTO AGREEMENT TO "PROHIBIT USE OF AMERICAN ARMS AGAINST TUNISIAN CITIZENS," IN THE CON-

FRONTATIONS BETWEEN WORKERS AND SECURITY FORCES WHICH WOULD OCCUR IN FUTURE. ACHOUR WARNED THAT UGTT COULDN'T GUARANTEE SECURITY OF U.S. EMBASSY PROPERTY DURING STREET MANIFESTATIONS IF U.S. ARMS WERE USED TO CONTROL LOCAL CIVILIAN POPULATIONS OR TO QUELL INTERNAL DISTURBANCES.

3. UGTT LEADERSHIP REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED LIVE INTEREST IN USG INTERPRETATION AND OPINION OF GOT SHAKEUP. REPORTING OFFICER REPLIED EMBASSY HAD NOT ANTICIPATED CHANGES AT THIS TIME, AND THAT WE WERE OBSERVING DEVELOPMENTS WITH A "WATH-AND-WAIT" ATTITUDE. ACHOUR MINIMIZED AND DISCOURAGED CONVERSATION ABOUT UGTT/LIBYAN CONNECTION. HE STATED RETURN TO TUNISIA OF EX-FOREIGN MINISTER MASMOUDI HAD NOTHING WHATEVER TO DO WITH RECENT GOT REALIGNMENT.

4. UGTT HAS ALSO SPOKEN OUT PUBLICLY IN CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES. ON DEC 24, AFTER BELKHODJA'S REMOVAL THE DAY BEFORE, UGTT EXECUTIVE BUREAU ISSUED STATEMENT UNDER ACHOUR'S SIGNATURE, CATEGORIZING ABDALLAH FARHAT'S NOMINATION AS INTERIOR MINISTER AD INTERIM AND COL. BEN ALI'S ASSIGNMENT AS CHIEF OF SURETE AS A "HARDENING" OF GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES. THE COMMUNIQUE CONTINUED THAT NEXT FEW DAYS WILL BE THE TEST. INDEED THIS TEST MAY NOT BE FAR OFF, HTTOOTDLTT ANNOUNCED ON DEC 28 THAT TWO MAJOR STRIKES WILL BE REIGNITED WITHIN THE WEEK (SEE TUNIS FOR BACKGROUND). THE MINERS FEDERATION WILL GO ON STRIKE DEC 30 "UNTIL COMPETENT AUTHORITIES GIVE SATISFACTION TO WORKERS' CONFIDENTIAL

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DEMANDS." IN THIS CASE, "COMPETENT AUTHORITIES" ARE THE STATE, WHICH OWNS AND OPERATES THE TUNISIAN PHOSPHATE INDUSTRY. THE RAILWAY WORKERS FEDERATION ALSO ANNOUNCED DEC 28 PLANS TO STAGE A THREE-DAY STRIKE BEGINNING JANUARY 2, 1978. ON OR NEAR THAT SAME DATE, THE UGTT HAS CALLED FOR ALL PUBLIC-SECTOR WORKERS IN THE GAFSA REGION (PHOSPHATE MINING DISTRICT IN SOUTHERN TUNISIA) TO LAUNCH A SYMPATHY STRIKE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE MINERS.

5. COMMENT: WE PERCEIVE MORE THAN A LITTLE BRINKSMANSHIP ON ACHOUR'S PART THROUGHOUT THIS EXCHANGE. OFTEN ACHOUR HAS PRESENTED THE ILLUSION OF IMMINENT COLLISION WITH THE GOT AUTHORITIES, ONLY TO BACK OFF SMARTLY WITHIN A PRUDENT MARGIN OF TIME AND SPACE. THE UNION DOES, HOWEVER, SEE RECENT INTERNAL REARRANGEMENTS WITHIN GOT AS A MAJOR STRATEGIC BLUNDER, AND AS A WINDFALL OPPORTUNITY FOR ITSELF TO EXPLOIT. UPON LABATT TAKING LEAVE, HE REITERATED LUNCH INVITATION FOR ACHOUR AND COUNCIL MEMBERS. ACHOUR AGREED BUT SAID THEY MUST DELAY IT UNTIL END OF STRIKES. THEN, ALMOST AS AFTERTHOUGHT AND IN HIGH HUMOR, HE SAID THAT THE STRIKES WOULD NOT END UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF ENDED. HIS FINAL WORDS WERE THAT "WE WILL BRING THIS GOVERNMENT DOWN."

MULCAHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TUNIS09175
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 102571
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TUNISIAN LABOR REACTIONS TO GOT CABINET SHIFTS SUMMARY: IN IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF CABINET SHAKEUP, HABIB ACHOUR OF UGTT PREDICTS INCREASING CIVIL AN D LABOR
TAGS: ELAB, TS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/dee520fb-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009